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ABSTRACT

From May through December 1995, a survey was conducted in the Bosnian language to gather information from resettled refugees about their perspectives on resettlement and their views on prearrival cultural orientation. Thirty-eight voluntary agencies distributed questionnaires, and nearly 200 Bosnians from 18 communities replied. Most respondents were male (63%), married (60%), and had either a secondary education (45%) or a university education (35%). More than half came to the United States as referrals from the United Nations High Command for Refugees, but few had attended prearrival cultural orientation. Those who had offered suggestions to make the introduction to the United States more realistic. The war in Bosnia had interrupted the education of 30 respondents, and more than two-thirds indicated that they were at a beginning level in English on arrival. Many commented on difficulties in having their diplomas recognized in the United States, and others commented on the high cost of higher education in the United States. Almost without exception respondents were positive about their children's adjustment to school. Nearly all commented on major differences between Bosnian and U.S. school systems, many noting that school in the United States is simpler, less comprehensive, and not as demanding as in Bosnia. About two-thirds were employed, and many noted work-related problems. More than half found their adjustment to the United States easy, but about 40% found it difficult. An appendix contains an English translation of the survey. (Contains one table.) (SLD)

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ED 398 316

Bosnian Resettlement in the U.S.
Part II: The Refugee Response
April 1996

Prepared by Pamela DiMeo
and Susan Somach

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BOSNIAN REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT IN THE U.S.

Part II: Refugee Response

April 1996

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BOSNIAN REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT IN THE U.S.

Part II: Refugee Response, April 1996

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Center for Applied Linguistics would like to thank the survey participants for sharing their experiences and thoughts, which we have attempted to summarize in this report. We also acknowledge the contribution of the voluntary agencies and their staff who distributed and then collected the surveys. Also, we are grateful to the dedicated ICMC cultural orientation teachers past and current -- Sanja, Jasna, Mustafa, Nives, Lana, Ivan, Mark, Katerina, and especially Ivana -- who translated and helped tabulate the survey responses. And finally, we thank Doug Gilzow for his editorial assistance.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In March, 1995, the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) conducted a survey of 42 service providers to gather information about the resettlement experiences of Bosnian refugees in the U.S. The survey was part of ongoing efforts to assist the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) in the development and maintenance of a responsive cultural orientation curriculum for their pre-departure program in Croatia and Slovenia. The findings were reported in ***Bosnian Refugee Resettlement in the U.S.: Survey Report, May 1995***.

From May through December, 1995, CAL conducted a follow-up survey in the Bosnian language to gather information from resettled Bosnian refugees about their perspective on resettlement and to seek their views on pre-arrival cultural orientation. Thirty-eight voluntary agencies distributed questionnaires to Bosnian refugees who had resettled since 1993. Nearly 200 Bosnians from 18 communities participated in the survey. ICMC staff in Zagreb translated the responses into English and compiled the results.

HIGHLIGHTS OF RESULTS:

General Information. The majority of the respondents were male (63%), married (60%), and had either a secondary (42%) or university (35%) education. More than half of the respondents indicated that they came to the United States as UNHCR referrals and two-thirds indicated that they came through Croatia. All of the respondents were relative newcomers: 53% had been in the U.S. for less than one year, and 43% for less than two years.

Housing. Most respondents indicated that they were satisfied with their present housing, although one-fourth indicated dissatisfaction. Those who were dissatisfied commented on the poor condition of the housing or the bad neighborhood in which it was located.

Education and ESL. The war in Bosnia had interrupted the education of thirty respondents. More than two-thirds (70%) of the respondents indicated that they were at a "beginning" level of English upon arrival in the U.S. Two-thirds of the respondents attended ESL classes in the U.S., the majority for only one to three months. Only twelve indicated that they had continued their education or obtained career training in the U.S. A number of respondents wrote that they had difficulties with their diplomas being recognized in the U.S., and others commented on the expense of higher education in the U.S.

Children's Adjustment to School. Almost without exception, respondents were positive about their children's adjustment to school. Nearly every respondent commented on the major differences between the American and Bosnian educational systems, noting that the school system in the U.S. is far simpler, less comprehensive, and not as demanding as the one in Bosnia.

Employment. About two-thirds of the respondents indicated that employment is their primary source of income. Two-thirds of employed respondents obtained their first job within three months of arriving in the U.S., most through their sponsoring agency. Most had worked in professional or skilled jobs in Bosnia but, with few exceptions, now held unskilled jobs in the U.S. Most respondents stated that the shift from professional or skilled work to unskilled work was due to their lack of English language skills.

Work-Related Problems. When asked about their biggest problems related to working in the U.S., respondents mentioned language, low pay, transportation/distance to work, health insurance/benefits, lack of time, not working in their profession, job insecurity and child care.

Adjustment to the U.S. More than half of the respondents rated their adjustment to the U.S. as "okay," "easy," or "very easy"; around 40% rated their adjustment as "difficult" or "very difficult." When asked about how life in the U.S. compared to their expectations, almost half indicated that life in the U.S. was worse than they had expected.

Cultural Orientation. Although only a small number of respondents had attended a cultural orientation program in Croatia, a large number offered suggestions for the CO program. The most frequent responses focused on the importance of giving people a "real" picture of the United States — clearly explaining the positive and negative aspects to those awaiting departure for the U.S. Many comments also expressed the need for English language classes, the importance of realistic work expectations, and the limited nature of financial/social assistance.

PART I: BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

In March, 1995, the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) conducted a survey of service providers to gather information about the resettlement experiences of Bosnian refugees as they related to the services provided by voluntary agencies. The survey was part of ongoing efforts to assist the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) in the development and maintenance of a responsive cultural orientation curriculum for their pre-departure program in Croatia and Slovenia. Forty-two voluntary agencies participated in the survey, and the findings were reported in ***Bosnian Refugee Resettlement in the U.S.: Survey Report, May 1995***.

From May through December, 1995, CAL conducted a follow-up survey of resettled Bosnian refugees to gather information from their perspective and to seek their views on pre-arrival cultural orientation. The survey focused on Bosnian refugees' expectations about life in the United states and their initial resettlement experiences. With the help of 38 voluntary agencies, over 1,500 questionnaires were distributed to Bosnian refugees who had been resettled since 1993. ICMC staff in Zagreb translated the responses into English and compiled the results.

This report summarizes follow-up survey findings, which have been used by ICMC in further developing its overseas cultural orientation (CO) curriculum. ICMC based its first curriculum in Zagreb on the curriculum International Organization for Migration (IOM) used with Eastern European refugees in the mid-1980's, incorporating suggestions from voluntary agencies and resettled Bosnians. In January, 1995, ICMC began developing a better focused curriculum, taking into account the cultural background and specific needs of the Bosnian refugees as well as current resettlement realities. The new curriculum includes Bosnian-specific cultural background notes for each program topic (education, employment, health, etc.) highlighting differences between the U.S. and Bosnia. The program topics also contain a section focusing on Bosnian resettlement and adjustment issues, based on direct feedback from voluntary agencies and Bosnians in the United States.

DISTRIBUTION OF SURVEYS

The survey of Bosnian refugees was carried out through a 34-item questionnaire (see Appendix) developed by CAL and ICMC staff and translated into Bosnian. When conducting the survey of service providers (i.e., voluntary agencies), CAL asked the respondents if they would distribute and collect the Bosnian refugee surveys. The following 39 agencies (38 voluntary agencies plus the Bosnian Refugee Center in Chicago) distributed 1,564 Bosnian-language surveys.

Catholic Social Service of Phoenix, AZ
International Rescue Committee(IRC), Phoenix, AZ

IRC, San Francisco, CA
Lutheran Social Services of Northeast Florida, Jacksonville, FL
World Relief Refugee Service, Clarkston, GA
Christian Council of Metropolitan Atlanta, GA
IRC, Decatur, GA
College of Southern Idaho Refugee Service Center, Twin Falls, ID
Sponsors Organized to Assist Refugees, Boise, ID
Bosnian Refugee Center, Chicago, IL
Iowa Department of Human Service, Bureau of Refugee Services, Des Moines, IA
Catholic Charities Migration & Refugee Services, Louisville, KY
Kentucky Refugee Ministries, Louisville, KY
International Institute of Boston, Boston, MA
IRC, Boston, MA
Department of Christian Service, Detroit, MI
Lutheran Social Services of Michigan, Southfield, MI
Tolstoy Foundation, Ferndale, MI
Catholic Charities Refugee Service, St. Louis, MO
International Institute of Metropolitan St. Louis, MO
Church Avenue Merchants Block Association, Brooklyn, NY
Catholic Charities Refugee Resettlement Program, Brooklyn, NY
Interreligious Council of Central NY, Syracuse, NY
Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees, Utica, NY
Lutheran Family Services in the Carolinas, Greensboro, NC
Parish Social Ministry, Cleveland, OH
Associated Catholic Charities, Oklahoma City, OK
International Institute of Erie, PA
Catholic Charities Immigration & Refugee Service , Harrisburg, PA
Tressler-Lutheran Services, Refugee Services, Mechanicsburg, PA
Ecumenical Commitment to Refugees (PRIME), Clifton Heights, PA
Lutheran Children and Family Service of Eastern PA, Philadelphia, PA
World Relief, Pittsburgh, PA
Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Pittsburgh, Refugee Services Program, PA
Catholic Charities Refugee Resettlement Program, Nashville, TN
Interfaith Ministries of Greater Houston, TX
Refugee Services Alliance, Houston, TX
YMCA International Services, Houston, TX
Lutheran Social Services, Washington, D.C.

DATA COLLECTION

From May through December, 1995, CAL received a total of 198 completed surveys from 18 of the 26 communities where surveys were distributed. The rate of response per community ranged from 1% to 61% (the Atlanta metropolitan area) of the total distributed.[1] The following indicates the number of responses received from each community:

Phoenix, AZ	16	Binghamton, NY	4
San Francisco, CA	25	Syracuse, NY	1
Jacksonville, FL	7	Greensboro, NC	2
Atlanta Metropolitan Area, GA	58	Cleveland, OH	2
Boise, ID	7	Erie, PA	3
Chicago, IL	9	Harrisburg, PA	8
Louisville, KY	19	Mechanicsburg, PA	3
Boston, MA	5	Philadelphia, PA	5
Detroit/Hamtramck, MI	4	Pittsburgh, PA	2
St. Louis, MO	18		

COMPILING RESULTS

Completed questionnaires were returned to CAL and sent to Zagreb where ICMC cultural orientation teachers translated the responses into English and tabulated the results.

[1] One voluntary agency from a community not included in the survey, Interreligious Council in Binghamton, NY, distributed English-language surveys from the appendix of ***Bosnian Refugee Resettlement in the U.S.: Survey Report, May 1995*** and returned four completed surveys.

PART II: SURVEY RESULTS

1. GENERAL INFORMATION

Note: Not all of the respondents responded to all of the questions on the surveys. Nearly all surveys included some questions left unanswered.

The following is general information about the survey respondents:

Gender		
Male	124	(63%)
Female	74	(37%)

Marital Status		
Single	68	(34%)
Married	119	(60%)
N/A	10	(5%)
Widow	1	(1%)

Education in Bosnia		
Primary	20	(10%)
Secondary	82	(42%)
Vocational	27	(14%)
University	68	(35%)

Free Cases vs. Family Reunification

103 (53%) of the respondents indicated that they came to the U.S. as UNHCR referrals
84 (43%) as family reunification cases
8 (4%) as medical evacuees

Transit Country to U.S.

128 (66%) indicated that they came to the U.S. through Croatia
9 (5%) through Slovenia
58 (30%) through other countries

Length of Time in the U.S

53% had been in the U.S. for less than 1 year
43% had been in the U.S. for less than 2 years
4% of the respondents had been in the U.S. for 2 years or more

Participation in Pre-Departure Cultural Orientation

Thirty-nine respondents said that they had participated in some type of cultural orientation prior to their departure.[2] Based on other responses, only 27 appear to have participated in ICMC's Cultural Orientation Program in the following locations:

5	Croatia (no city noted)	2	Gašinci (refugee transit camp in Croatia)
15	Zagreb	2	Varaždin (refugee collective center in Croatia)
3	Split		

Five respondents reported that they had received a cultural orientation in Belgrade (likely referring to the English language training program offered in Belgrade), while three others indicated they received orientation in Austria, Denmark, or Germany.

Community Resources

When asked who had been most helpful to them in finding out about community resources, respondents answered as indicated below:

Family	79	(32%)
Voluntary Agency	63	(26%)
Group or Church	52	(21%)
Friends	47	(19%)
No one	3	(1%)

Note: A number of the respondents listed more than one answer to this question.

[2] Almost half of the respondents arrived in the U.S. before the ICMC Cultural Orientation Program began in Zagreb in July, 1994. Currently, about 70% of the adult Bosnian refugees (16 and older) who depart from Croatia or Slovenia attend a cultural orientation program in Zagreb or at one of the 16 satellite locations where ICMC conducts classes.

2. HOUSING

Type/Cost of Housing

Of those respondents who specified the size of their apartment, most said they lived in a 1-bedroom apartment. High and low amounts are listed here for one-bedroom apartments. Two-bedroom apartments are not included as it was not clear whether respondents were indicating a total or a share of the rental cost. The range of monthly rental amounts is indicated below:

State	*1 BR-low*	*1 BR-high*
Arizona	$300	$365
California	$600	$725
Florida	$343 (1 response)	$370 (1)
Georgia	$400	$470
Idaho	$300	$350
Illinois	$425	$460
Kentucky	$349 (1)	$375 (1)
Massachusetts	$700 (1)	
Michigan	$300 (1)-3 BR	
Missouri	$250	$300
North Carolina	$300 (2)-one in a 3 BR apt.	
New York	$350	$450
Ohio	$400 (2)-one in a 2 BR apt.	$420
Pennsylvania	$345	$545

Satisfaction with Present Housing

Yes:	95	(55%)
No:	48	(28%)
Indifferent:	31	(18%)

Comments:

The few responses with comments about dissatisfaction with housing include the following:

- *The two-bedroom apartment is unbearable because there is no air conditioning. (Arizona)*
- *We are a four-member family in a one bedroom in a very dangerous neighborhood where there are school shoot-outs every evening.*
- *I am a single person in a small apartment which is in poor condition.*
- *We are a three-member family living in an apartment under poor, unhygienic conditions.*
- *The apartments were horrible and we could not live comfortably because of the bugs. The maintenance workers at the apartment were not really efficient.*

3. ESL AND EDUCATION

Level of English upon Arrival in the U.S.

Beginning:	133	(70%)
Intermediate	37	(19%)
Advanced	20	(11%)

Two-thirds of the respondents indicated that they had attended ESL classes in the U.S. The length of time of attendance varied from one month to two years. Thirteen said their ESL classes were ongoing. Twenty-one of the respondents stated that they had ESL tutors.

Length of time Studying ESL

One to three months:	71	(64%)
Four to six months:	14	(13%)
More than 6 months:	10	(9%)
Ongoing:	16	(14%)

Education Interrupted By War

Thirty respondents indicated that their education had been interrupted because of war.

Continuing Education

Only 12 respondents indicated that they had continued their education or obtained career training in the U.S.

Comments:

- *Yes, with ILS Tucker as a computer applications specialist.*
- *Yes, I took course and passed exams which enabled me to become certified in the States.*
- *Yes, I'm in school again.*

- *I continued my elementary school.*
- *High school of Clarkston of Georgia*
- *I'm continuing my education.*
- *I passed the professional exam for dental technician in August.*
- *YWCA--computer course.*

CHILDREN AND SCHOOL

Children's Adjustment to School

When asked about their children's adjustment to school, respondents wrote almost without exception "good," "very good," or "excellent." Only five respondents were less than enthusiastic, stating that their children's adjustment had been "very difficult," or "average" (two respondents). Only one respondent who indicated that his children's adjustment had been difficult elaborated, citing lack of English language skills as the cause.

Comments included:

- *The children are doing very well and are getting good grades.*
- *They tell them they're excellent students.*
- *My children are doing very well in school. My older daughter is in the fourth grade. She will skip the fifth grade and start in the sixth next fall. My younger daughter is in the first grade. Neither of them has any problems with English.*
- *Children are doing really well in school and learning the language quickly.*
- *They're doing very well, surprisingly well, when considering the language and the culture.*
- *Beyond expectations.*
- *Good. They find it easier.*
- *I have two sons who will go to a "gifted" program.*
- *Excellent. My older son finished fifth grade and my younger son is in kindergarten and speaks English very well.*
- *Very well, better than adults.*
- *Good, but they have to learn more English.*

Differences in the Educational System

Nearly every respondent commented on the major differences between the American and Bosnian educational systems. Several respondents stated that the school systems are different "in every way." Many commented that the school system in the U.S. is more focused and much less complicated and comprehensive than in Bosnia. Many stated that schools in the U.S. are much easier and less demanding of students. A few commented that they felt the educational system in the U.S. was worse than in Bosnia. Several respondents wrote that they had difficulties with their diplomas being recognized in the U.S., and several others commented on how expensive higher education is in the U.S.

Comments included:

- *Granted the learning conditions are excellent, education here is too broad, and does not cover as many topics as it did in my homeland.*
- *The student-teacher relationship is more democratic and the schools are better organized.*
- *Our children attending school know more than American kids of the same age.*
- *The educational system is less complicated than in Bosnia--a lot more class time, learning and less homework than in Bosnia.*
- *They are more attentive to children. The program is easier, more logical, and children get to make decisions and ask questions.*
- *The kids have said that it is easier and more fun, less homework and studying, but they have to be more independent and to be free to have their own opinion and express themselves.*
- *The kids spend more time in school. I'm satisfied with the program and think it pays more attention to a child's abilities and takes care of his interests.*
- *They don't push the kids as hard here.*
- *The school system back home was harder, especially the first few years.*
- *The subjects are a lot easier than what we have taught in our country.*
- *The educational system here is much easier, less pressure. The educational possibilities are greater.*
- *In every way, our schools are harder.*
- *There are fewer courses and more time spent in school. They have international schools and good programs.*
- *I think the schools are wonderful. There are many opportunities for those who want to study.*
- *Schools are much easier than ours. With a high school diploma, one can find a better job. The thing that surprised me was that Americans get free education all their lives, but colleges are so expensive.*
- *The educational system in my country is much more complex.*
- *We're better prepared for life and work after 12 years of education than Americans. They lack in general culture and education.*
- *I'm not very well informed about the schools, but as far as I can tell, the educational system is really stretched out so that you can study even after age 60.*
- *It is unbelievable that children with no knowledge of English are enrolled, for example, in the 10th grade. Unbelievable!*
- *If you want to get a better education, you have to continue with your education after secondary school, but it's very expensive.*
- *They have less subjects in school and they don't get a good general education.*
- *They take perfect care of children going and coming back from school. There is less pressure as far as the timetable is concerned.*

4. EMPLOYMENT

Primary Source of Income

Regarding primary source of income, the responses were as follows:

Employment:	108	(64%)
RCA/Food Stamps/Welfare:	43	(25%)
SSI/Disability	7	(4%)
Caritas/Private	6	(4%)
Voluntary Agency	3	(2%)
Church	1	(1/2%)
Military Program of the U.S.	1	(1/2%)

Some respondents indicated that their primary source of income was not only their own employment but also that of other family members.

EMPLOYMENT IN BOSNIA AND THE U.S.

Number of Years Working in Bosnia

Less than one year:	5	(3%)
1 -5 years:	29	(20%)
5-10 years:	22	(15%)
10 - 20 years:	63	(43%)
20-30 years:	21	(14%)
30-40 years:	6	(4%)

Employment in Bosnia

Professional:	46	(43%)
Skilled:	42	(39%)
Unskilled:	19	(18%)

Employment in the U.S.

Professional:	6	(6%)
Skilled:	19	(19%)
Unskilled:	73	(74%)

Many respondents stated that the shift from professional or skilled work to unskilled work was due to their lack of English language skills. Some commented that their skills and experience in a professional field would be useful to them once they acquired the necessary English language skills.

Length of Time to Obtain First Job

Less than one month:	15	(13%)
1 - 3 months:	63	(53%)
3 - 6 months:	30	(25%)
6 months - 1 year:	10	(8%)
More than one year:	2	(2%)

Occupation in Bosnia:

Approximately 80% of the refugees listed occupations in Bosnia that would fall under professional or skilled labor categories.

A. Professional

Teacher/Professor (11)
Director/Manager (9)
Engineer (7)
Doctor (5)
Lawyer (5)
Architect (2)
Economist (2)
Agriculturalist
International Trade
Journalist/Book Critic
Nurse
Social Worker

B. Skilled

Technician (3 Building, 4 Medical, 1 Dental, 1 Telecommunication, 1 Veterinary Lab)
Sales person (5)
Auto Mechanic (4)
Electrician (2)
Machinist (2)
Truck Driver (2)
Architect's Assistant
Bank Clerk
Beautician
Builder
Carpenter
Civil Servant
Furniture Maker
Legal Assistant
Locksmith
Mechanical Draftsman
Metal Worker
Milling
Textile Industry
Tourism
Teleprinter

C. Unskilled

Factory Worker (6)
Construction Worker/Laborer (5)
Odd Jobs (3)
Bricklayer (2)
Bartender
Housepainter
Machine Operator

Type of Job In the U.S.

Approximately 75% of the jobs they listed as their employment in the U.S. would be considered unskilled, entry level positions.

A. Professional

Architect
Caseworker
Computer Analyst/Programmer
English Teacher
Social Worker

B. Skilled

Auto Mechanic (3)
Translator (3)
Technician (1 Dental, 1 Electronics)
Carpenter (2)
Artist
Baker
Butcher
Hairdresser
Hairdresser
Home Construction
Machinist
Plumber
Rental Sales Agent
Seamstress
Supervisor - Production (electronics firm)

C. Unskilled

Cleaning/Janitor (11)
Laborer (10)
Factory Worker (9)
Odd Jobs (5)
Waitress/Waiter (5)
Dishwasher (4)
Hotel Maid (3)
Clerical (2)
Filling Bags (2)
Housepainter (2)
Metal Worker (2)
Sales (2)
Cook
Counting Boxes
Electrician's Helper
Gardener
Laundry Worker
Machine Operator
Packaging Steel and Wood
Sticking Pictures
Stock Clerk
Textile Worker
Transport Worker
Warehouse Worker

Method of Obtaining First Job		
Sponsor/Voluntary Agency	57	(55%)
Friend(s)	18	(17%)
Myself	11	(11%)
Job Application/Classified Ad	10	(10%)
Employment Agency	6	(6%)
Family	2	(2%)

Availability of Optional Health Insurance from Employer[3]		
Yes, Paid by Company:	47	(34%)
Yes, With Employee Co-Pay:	48	(31%)
No:	28	(19%)
Unanswered:	23	(16%)

Satisfaction with Present Job		
Yes:	52	(41%)
No:	52	(41%)
Unanswered:	26	(20%)

When asked about their satisfaction with their present job, respondents were almost evenly divided between "yes" and "no." When asked about things that were the biggest problems for them working in the U.S., many commented that both life and work were quite difficult without English language skills. Others commented on their salary and the struggle to meet their expenses with a low or minimum wage income, and a number of others wrote about the difficulty of getting to work, the long distances they had to travel and the difficulty of doing this without a car. Several also noted the lack of health insurance and other benefits.

Respondents who are dissatisfied with their jobs made the following comments:

- *I'm not content with my salary.*
- *Never in this land will there be any kind of life for Bosnians.*
- *No, but my English was very basic. Now it is much better and I will try to find a better job and even try to study law in school.*
- *I'm not in a position to choose, but I do think that my salary should be higher, given the kind of job I have.*

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[3] The high rate of respondents who stated that they have optional health insurance through their employers (65%) may seem unusual given the high percentage of respondents in entry-level unskilled work. This anomaly may be the result of the refugees' misunderstanding as to who provides RMA as well as the success of volags (mentioned during the volag survey) in placing refugees in entry-level jobs that provide insurance.

- *I would be satisfied if I had a higher hourly wage. Then I would be able to put aside enough money to go back to Bosnia.*
- *Satisfied because we can survive, unsatisfied professionally.*
- *I am not, but I hope the situation will get better.*
- *No, but I'm looking for something better. The greatest problem is the far distance to work and access to public transportation.*
- *Not completely, but I hope to move upward.*
- *No, my wage is small compared to my family members.*

The following are comments from respondents who indicated that they are satisfied with their jobs:

- *I'm satisfied because I don't know English well, so it's okay for now.*
- *Yes, but I'd like to do better.*
- *Basically yes, but I think I can work much better jobs.*
- *For now yes. I'm surrounded by honest people, friends who want to help me.*
- *Yes, because I have no other option.*
- *Compared to my countrymen, I am.*

Skills Most Useful in Daily Life and Work

In answering this question, about half of the respondents said that a knowledge of English was one of the most useful skills. A number commented on the ability to adapt to various situations, and stated that the willingness to accept any job was important. Few of the respondents listed concrete job skills as being more significant than personal skills and work attitudes. Several commented on the importance of working hard and having a good work ethic. A number mentioned the importance of diligence and persistence. A few of the respondents focused on the importance of being in good health, as many of the jobs require physical labor.

Comments are grouped under the main categories of responses:

English and Specific Job Skills

- *Knowledge of English and computers.*
- *English and an automobile.*
- *Knowledge of English and a good work ethic.*
- *Knowledge of language and adjustment to all types of jobs.*
- *Be prepared to work. The type of job should not matter. Work on learning English.*
- *Experience, skills.*
- *Having different work skills.*
- *To have different skills and to be willing to accept any job.*
- *Maintenance knowledge helps with my job.*
- *When I know English, my knowledge of economics will help me.*
- *Knowledge of field.*

Adaptability

- *Persistence and adapting to various situations, patience.*
- *Recognizing opportunities and taking full advantage of these.*
- *The ability to survive.*
- *A quick adjustment to the way of life and work.*
- *To have different skills and be willing to accept any job.*
- *I learned to be resourceful in my home city during the war.*
- *The ability to adjust to one's environment is the most useful trait one can have.*

Work Habits and Attitudes

- *Commitment, being thorough.*
- *Professionalism.*
- *Ability to communicate.*
- *Good work habits, which I've always had.*
- *Punctuality, work ethic and hard work.*
- *Work, diligence--one has to be honest and a hard worker.*
- *Endurance.*
- *Education, good manners, moral characteristics.*
- *We love to work.*

Physical Health

- *The most important thing is to be healthy, because most jobs are hard, physical labor.*
- *Physical condition.*
- *Being conscious of the fact that I must take care of myself.*
- *Health, strength, adaptability and endurance.*
- *Good health, good nerves.*

Problems Working in the U.S.

When asked about the biggest problems related to working in the U.S., respondents mentioned language, low pay, transportation/distance to work, health insurance/benefits, lack of time, not working in their profession, job insecurity and child care.

Language *33 responses*

- *Not understanding co-workers.*
- *The biggest problem is lack of language skills.*
- *Contact with people [is difficult] due to ignorance of the language.*

- *I have quite a few problems with English.*
- *Life and work are hard as long as you don't speak English.*

Low Pay *18*

- *I've been working for minimum wage since I came here.*
- *For anything you want, you have to work very, very hard.*
- *Long working hours, low wages, expensive rents.*
- *My needs are greater than my possibilities.*

Transportation/Distance to Work *19*

- *The distance between home and work and the inability to get a car, without which life in America is unthinkable.*
- *I travel every day for two hours; the job is trying for a woman my age.*
- *I don't have a car or money to buy one. Here everyone must have a car to live normally because the city transportation is almost non-existent.*
- *Long distances.*

Health Insurance/Benefits *10*

- *Unpaid sick days.*
- *Health insurance and small pay are the biggest problems.*
- *At my first job, I didn't have any kind of insurance.*

Lack of Time *6*

- *Jobs are hard, exhausting and I don't have time for my kids.*
- *Little time for the children.*
- *Lots of work, little free time, low pay.*

Not Working in Profession *5*

- *Job does not coincide with my profession in Bosnia.*
- *That I am unable to work in my profession.*
- *Not enough knowledge of the language and the fact that they don't recognize any diplomas, so you have to start from the lowest job.*

- *The inability of humanitarian and other organizations who deal with refugees to categorize our talents properly and not throw us all together irrespective of work abilities and education.*

Job Insecurity *3*

- *Keeping your job.*
- *Uncertainty in the fact that I could lose my job at any time.*
- *Today you work, for tomorrow one doesn't know if you work or not.*

Child Care *3*

- *It's difficult to find someone to take care of my children.*
- *I'm an unemployed single mother.*
- *Before my husband came, I had problems finding a baby-sitter when I worked the second shift.*

Other

- *Explaining who refugees are.*
- *Difficulty in finding a better job.*
- *No problems except for my personal dissatisfaction with work.*
- *Missing my family.*
- *Paying taxes at the end of the year.*
- *Lack of credit history and the impossibility of finding a co-signer.*
- *I don't have any big problems. I think that work and continuing of education are the best ways to make a successful life in the U.S.*

Easiest Things about Work

A number of the refugees responded to this question in a rather general way, commenting on life in the United States rather then just work. The most frequent response was that nothing was easy.

Nothing is Easy *26*

- *There are few easy things at the beginning. One is that when you get a job, the employer is ready to train you as if you know nothing, even when you know some things very well.*
- *There are no easy things here.*

Spending Money/Shopping *14*

- *Pulling out your credit card when paying your bill.*
- *Picking up the paycheck.*
- *Shopping--everything is in one place.*
- *Saturday and Sunday, and spending money.*
- *The shops are well stocked and modern. You can find anything in the world, but we don't have enough money.*

Contact with People/Lifestyle *9*

- *Friends I have met in the USA are really helping me feel like I'm at home.*
- *I have many friends.*
- *People are very open.*
- *The way of life in the U.S. and the customs and culture are similar to the way of life in the larger cities in Bosnia.*
- *Contact with people. People are hospitable and make an effort to help and understand if it is within their power.*

Other

- *The best thing about the U.S. is that nobody asks you whether you are a Muslim, Croat, or Serb, or what your family name is.*
- *The basic thing is that a job helps refugees to be independent.*
- *Transportation for our kids to go to school is well-organized.*
- *The easiest thing is to sleep so I don't have to think about my life.*
- *Go to sleep and dream a dream that I'm in wonderland.*
- *To fall in love with America.*
- *Everything.*
- *No war, so I'm not afraid.*
- *When I'm with my family.*
- *When you work, everything is good*
- *Retired life.*
- *Drinking beer.*
- *Vacation.*

5. ADJUSTMENT TO THE U.S.

Adjustment to the U.S. Rating

Very Easy:	13	(7%)
Easy:	28	(15%)
Okay:	72	(39%)
Difficult:	48	(26%)
Very Difficult:	23	(13%)

Comparison of Life in the U.S. with Expectations

Better:	15	(10%)
Worse:	67	(44%)
Same or Neutral:	72	(47%)

Comments:

Better than Expected

- *We didn't expect anything special. It is better than what we expected.*
- *I'm pleasantly surprised because it is better than expected.*
- *It's not quite the best, but I'm expecting it to be better.*
- *I am not surprised by the American way of life because I knew quite a few things about it before I came. Also, my former employer in Bosnia had business contacts with Boeing and McDonnell Douglas, which made it easier for me to adjust.*
- *I'm better off here.*
- *I am more than pleased by the change--I'm overjoyed!*
- *A lot of surprises. More understanding. Saved! We have saved our children.*
- *Considering the current condition of Bosnia, it's not bad in the U.S.*

Worse than Expected

- *I feel as though I'm ten years older than I really am. I'm extremely disappointed.*
- *I expected to find what I had seen in the movies. Of course I'm disappointed.*
- *I'm somehow surprised. I was expecting more, but I do understand why things are the way they are. I'm happy my children are away from a war situation.*
- *I was expecting something better. The U.S. is dangerous--drugs, rape. One does not feel safe at the workplace.*
- *I expected more; to be better paid for my hard work.*

- *The change was a shock, but I expected it. It is worse, but that's what happens when you start over.*
- *I didn't know that I would have to pay the airfare, and I expected more time to learn the English language.*
- *I expected more (social and medical aid is limited--I thought it was in a better state). People have to be independent too soon. There is a short time to adjust.*
- *I'm living worse than I used to.*
- *I expected that I would be able to start working immediately and that I would receive welfare more quickly in the beginning.*
- *Yes, it surprised me, and it's a lot worse than I expected. Life here is very hard and complicated.*
- *I expected better from America, but what it is, it is. I didn't have any other option.*
- *I was surprised by the poor life in Florida because we thought it was the most beautiful part of America. Nothing was like we thought it would be and there is nothing really interesting to be seen.*
- *I expected that it would be difficult because I heard lots of information about America from people who lived there and are still living in the States. It's a little more difficult than I thought it was going to be.*

Same as Expected

- *Nothing surprised us. We knew what to expect. We had been informed about everything during the orientation.*
- *Life here is just the way I had expected.*
- *The way of life is different, but I was expecting that.*
- *I didn't expect anything special, but I'm relatively satisfied.*
- *All over the world people are the same. Only the rules and habits are different.*
- *I guess we live in a more or less similar way.*
- *I am not surprised because I know, from before, a lot about the U.S...I expected to make a new life for my family.*
- *After the war in Bosnia, no other way of life could surprise me.*
- *Before coming I didn't have any idea about America, so everything surprised me. Some things unpleasantly and some unpleasantly.*
- *I thought that people in foreign countries are different. It only depends on you.*

Adjustment Process: Change in Beliefs or Behavior

When asked how their beliefs and behavior had changed since coming to the U.S., a majority of respondents stated that their beliefs had not changed. Many commented on their disappointment and the difficulties of starting over in a new country where they had to struggle to survive. A smaller number expressed optimism, feeling that their new life in the United States had brought positive changes, and that things got better for them and became easier as time went by.

No Change in Beliefs: *32*

- *Nothing has changed. I still have the same beliefs.*
- *Nothing has changed, except my refrigerator is full, always.*
- *My way of thinking and acting remained the same upon arrival in the U.S. I'm just trying to adjust to the way of life here in America.*
- *I have the same beliefs and behaviors.*

Disappointed: *33*

- *Life in the U.S. is hard and unpredictable. The future is hard to predict too.*
- *I have gone 90% mad and constantly think about returning to my beautiful Bosnia.*
- *I behave in the same way, but I no longer trust people.*
- *No free time, no good feelings...I am also touched by what is presently happening in Bosnia.*
- *You must understand that when you start from "0," it is hard on you psychologically, physically, and morally.*
- *This way of life never intrigued me.*
- *I'm very stressed and sick. A "new beginning" is difficult for older people.*
- *I don't have enough hope or optimism. I feel foreign.*
- *I expected more help because I come from a country at war.*
- *Coming to America, I felt that it's really foreign and I really began to love my land of Bosnia and Herzegovina.*
- *What can I say, I'm unemployed and I have no money, and in the U.S. if you have no money, it's difficult to start. No one will help me, and psychologically it's very difficult.*
- *In the sense that they don't accept us because we don't know English.*
- *I realize that in America the beginning is exceptionally hard and that it's necessary to be exceptionally fortified, both psychologically and physically in order to somehow get through it. I'm trying hard to do that.*
- *I'm disappointed in the appearance of America and Americans. I expected a more cultured nation with better living conditions.*
- *There is no understanding or humanity for people coming from Bosnia, from the war -- they are treated as everyone else.*
- *The U.S. doesn't care about its new residents. Its goal is to get as much manpower as possible and give them little money.*
- *There is no health coverage and [I have] a great desire to go back to my homeland.*

Optimistic About Their Lives in the U.S.: *17*

- *I have a chance to create a better life here with a wider range of opportunities.*
- *Everything has changed. Nice reception.*

- *You have to accept the American way of thinking which means reorienting your thinking.*
- *I feel safe and secure. The high crime rate doesn't bother me. By reading American magazines and newspapers I have learned a lot about society and politics. Now I understand better how Americans view the problems in my country.*
- *I have changed in the past year. I don't feel so homesick now as I was in the beginning and I'm not afraid of new things anymore. I learned how to get a better job by learning English.*
- *Coming to America, I really experienced what a free, open-minded society is. I really like the fact that people of all different kinds of ethnic and social backgrounds live together.*

6. CULTURAL ORIENTATION

Most Useful Aspects of Overseas Cultural Orientation

The following are comments from those who said that they had attended a CO program in Croatia.[4]

Comments:

- *It helped us by telling us the facts so we were prepared psychologically and weren't overly optimistic.*
- *Everything.*
- *Let people know more about health care.*
- *About health, education, and employment.*
- *Nothing that I didn't know before.*
- *The information helped me before my departure.*
- *The most useful thing I learned at the CO course was information about the American way of life (in terms of employment, education, health, and banking).*
- *The most important thing here is work and honesty.*
- *You have to work and be independent if you want to survive here.*
- *Very useful because of all the information, for example, about alcohol, smoking, etc.*
- *Work ethics, and accept any job that is offered.*
- *All information was useful.*
- *I learned a lot in the CO program. The teachers are very good and so is the content of the program itself. What I learned helped me to adjust.*
- *Understanding the mentality of Americans and their way of life.*

[4] A number of respondents answered this question even though they indicated previously in the questionnaire that they had not attended a CO program in Croatia.

What Respondents Wished They Had Learned Before Coming to the United States

A large number of respondents answered this question. Although the most frequent response was English, others included the importance of the being willing to work hard and accept any job. Other comments focused on a wide range of areas: housing, health care, welfare/social services, education, and the American way of life in general.

English: *49*

- *Many things I would like to learn, firstly language.*
- *To learn the English language so that I could get a better job.*
- *To finish learning the language and to have a better command of speaking.*
- *There are many things I would like to learn, but without knowing English, you can't do anything.*
- *To learn English (it's not going well).*

Work: *12*

- *The language and finding jobs are the most difficult issues.*
- *People should be prepared to work at jobs that are not the same as they had in their own country and to expect to have to start from the beginning.*
- *I learned all the important things within a year in the U.S. I would like to develop additional working skills, to be able to work different jobs. It is a very important thing in this country.*
- *There are things--career/skills training (identifying work skills).*
- *There are. How do you find a job and a normal life for a man?*
- *Here I've learned that life revolves around work, work, and only work.*
- *I wish I knew more about work.*
- *The main problem is finding a job. At work, one can adapt to the traditions and customs of the new culture.*
- *Yes, how to get our training and diplomas. Without U.S. degrees, we can only get basic jobs and many of us aren't able to go to school again for 4 to 6 years.*

Other

- *American culture and the way of life are 100% different from that in Europe. The people should be informed about this.*
- *More English, American culture, work ethic, loans, employment, education.*
- *I wanted to know about the assistance I would receive, chances for employment and survival, and the welfare/social situation.*
- *Housing, health care, rent, public benefits.*
- *How to drive.*
- *There are a lot of things. I hope I will learn more about health insurance and credit.*

- *There are--show the refugees American reality without advertisement and beautification.*
- *I need more information about culture, the way of life, and education.*
- *You cannot learn everything about this life in two months. It takes years and years.*
- *To know everything in one month would be a lot. To learn quickly how to live in America would be nice.*
- *We would like to know about American culture, their traditions and customs.*
- *To do electrical work in the American way.*
- *First of all, nobody told us that the money we are working for is hardly going to cover our bills and food expenses. And the criminal activities are bigger than anyone could imagine. They have completely different laws and the biggest problem is health coverage because people from the former Yugoslavia are used to free health care and it is very expensive here. But, on the other hand, there are lots of good things and everyone knew about these.*

Suggestions for Cultural Orientation

Almost all respondents offered comments on this item. One of the most frequent responses focused on the importance of giving people the "real" picture of the United States--clearly explaining the positive and negative aspects to those awaiting departure for the U.S. Several commented on the difficulty of adapting, particularly for those who are older or in ill health. One commented that people should not come expecting the "Promised Land." Many other comments centered on employment (how to find work, the need to work hard, and realistic work expectations), realistic expectations concerning social and financial assistance, and the importance of beginning English language studies before arrival in the U.S.

Give the Real Picture of Life in the U.S. *43*

- *Let people know the details, and tell them exactly what awaits them, and that they should be prepared to work at any job that is offered.*
- *The people must be given a realistic picture of America, the land to which they will be going. Explain the differences between our system and theirs. America is a country that is more for younger people.*
- *Explain to possible resettlement candidates in detail the reality of the situation, especially to those with ill health and of middle age, and who don't speak English. It will be difficult to find work, particularly for those near 65 years of age.*
- *More information and less illusion.*
- *You must make people aware of welfare issues, health, insurance, and the problems the elderly might face. America is not what we saw in the movies. It is pretty bleak.*
- *Let people watch movies about problems within the American society.*
- *Don't let anyone present the U.S. as a fairy tale. It is a harsh country. Only the strongest, most persistent, capable and hard-working can make it here.*

- *It's mandatory that you show Bosnians the real picture. I don't know how it works now, but when I went there was no information. If I knew what I know now, I would have never taken such a big step. Maybe I feel this way because of the way I lived before, but it also depends on the surroundings. I wish I could change my decision.*
- *Refugees must know the differences between America and our system (i.e., you pay for health insurance, you can't get a pension unless you're over 65, you must be independent within three months). It's difficult for older people who can't work at hard jobs.*
- *Show them "Dynasty" and tell them that it's only a film. There is none of that for Bosnians.*

English Classes *16*

- *Everyone should be taught English before they come.*
- *Work on making an ESL program and tell the truth about what awaits them.*
- *Without the English language, you can do nothing.*
- *Teach people English!*
- *A three-month training program with an instructor who knows our language and English*
- *Don't cloud people's eyes. It's difficult for older people here who don't know the English language.*
- *Required language learning.*
- *ESL classes should be provided to refugees in Croatia for six months and not here for one month.*
- *My suggestion is that people should learn the language more because we literate ones have to be laborers [without English].*

Realistic Work Expectations *13*

- *Tell people about the kinds of jobs they can expect here--mostly positions of hard physical labor. Also, after six months, people lose their health insurance. People who are sick and over 65 should not come because they will have to work anyway.*
- *Clearly explain the good and bad things that are awaiting them in the U.S.: 1. It must be explained to people how to find a job; 2. That 95% of the people won't be able to have the same jobs they in Bosnia and studied in school; and 3. They will receive the lowest hourly wage for at least a year.*
- *It's true that life in America is hard, but it's better that people come to America and start a "new life." People who like to work and who have good work habits don't have to be afraid. Those types become independent faster.*
- *The most important thing is work and adjustment.*
- *One has to work very hard to survive in the U.S.*

Limited Financial/Social Assistance *12*

- *Tell people not to expect too much financial help (i.e,, welfare) and also tell them about the paperwork (there's too much).*
- *Public Assistance is very limited.*
- *Explain the differences between living and working in the U.S. and in Bosnia, and be explicit about what they can expect.*
- *How long people can get public assistance, how much they will get, and about health insurance after medicare is cut. What about employment for people who are 50-60 years old, sick, and don't speak English?*
- *People should have more financial help.*
- *For arriving families, it is necessary that they have health insurance.*
- *Better organization for coming to the U.S., more financial help--a lot more than now.*

Other

- *You should explain to the people that the U.S. does not recognize many of our diplomas or degrees, and when they come to the States they must start from scratch. Also explain to them that here they don't use the metric system and that the temperature is measured in degrees Fahrenheit as opposed to centigrade.*
- *This kind of organization should have a program to help our diplomas be accepted in the U.S., which would be good for persons coming to the U.S., as well as for the U.S.*
- *Everyone should go through a CO course.*
- *Only one, give people from Bosnia an opportunity to come here and start a new life.*
- *Yes, to remember the concentration camps.*
- *The American course on culture and way of life should be compulsory.*
- *They should interview [resettled] Bosnians and share the interviews with newcomers.*
- *Difference in culture and behavior.*

PART III: POSTSCRIPT FROM ICMC/ZAGREB

The CO program based in Zagreb has continually evolved as we have received more and more information and feedback, from voluntary agencies through the CAL-sponsored surveys, and from Bosnians through course evaluations and questionnaires. As a compilation of the experiences and voices of many Bosnian refugees in the U.S. for varying lengths of time, this refugee survey is an additional valuable resource in guiding the curriculum.

As we try to identify what refugees most need to know before departing for the U.S., what we have heard from Bosnians in this survey often parallels what voluntary agencies have shared with us in the earlier survey. These areas include:

* an understanding of the limitations of financial and social assistance in the U.S.,
* the need to begin working as soon as possible,
* having realistic expectations about the kind of work one will be able to do initially,
* understanding the health care system and its limitations,
* the importance of learning survival English, and
* the need to become independent and self-sufficient as soon as possible.

As many Bosnians in the U.S. have shared with us, "the struggle is not over." Large numbers of the refugees expressed the great importance of presenting to those accepted for resettlement a realistic picture of life in the U.S. In that way, refugees can arrive with more realistic expectations, thereby easing disappointment and the shock of the adjustment process.

The many questionnaires we have received have enabled us to allow students to hear as directly as possible from Bosnian refugees and voluntary agencies in the U.S. The refugee voices are shared on the walls of our resource area and are woven throughout the curriculum. We look forward to continuing this important sharing of perspectives and experiences at the various steps and stages of the resettlement process as the links are strengthened among the Bosnians, the voluntary agencies and other sponsors, and those of us working with the Cultural Orientation Program in Zagreb. Through these partnerships and linkages, we can create an effective continuum for the refugees that will facilitate their adjustment to their new lives and enhance their ability to achieve self-sufficiency more rapidly. These partnerships form an important base and can serve as a model for future CO programs.

APPENDIX

CENTER FOR APPLIED LINGUISTICS
REFUGEE SERVICE CENTER
Bosnian Refugee Questionnaire

The purpose of this questionnaire is to collect information about the resettlement experiences of recently arrived refugees from Bosnia in order to improve and update the International Catholic Migration Commission pre-entry cultural orientation program. The information you share with us will help ICMC do a better job of preparing Bosnian refugees for arrival in the United States. ALL INFORMATION WILL REMAIN ANONYMOUS.

General Information:

1. Sex: _____ male _____ female 2. Marital Status: _____ single _____ married
3. City and state where you are currently living _____
4. How you came to U.S.: _____ family reunification (AOR) _____ UNHCR referral _____ Medivac
5. Arrival in U.S.: (month, year) _____
6. Did you come here alone or with family? _____ What is the size of your family? _____
7. Did you come through Croatia/Slovenia before your arrival here? If not, where?
8. Did you participate in an ICMC cultural orientation program? Where and for how long?
9. When you first arrived in the U.S., who helped you the most in finding out about community resources?
   _____ group/church _____ voluntary agency _____ family _____ friends
10. What kind of place are you living in at the present? _____
    What is your monthly rent? $_____ per month
11. Are you satisfied and/or comfortable with your living conditions?

ESL/Education:

12. What was the highest level of education you reached in your home country?
    _____ primary school _____ vocational school (field of study: _____)
    _____ secondary school _____ university (field of study: _____; degree? _____)
13. Was your education interrupted because of the war?
14. What level of English did you have when you came to the U.S.?
    _____ beginning _____ intermediate _____ advanced
15. Have you studied English in the U.S.?
    _____ ESL classes. For how long? _____
    _____ ESL tutor. For how long? _____
16. Have you continued your education or obtained career training? What type and where?

Employment

17. How many years did you work and what type of job did you have in your home country?
    number of years _____ type of job _____
18. What skills have you found most useful in your work and daily life in the U.S.?

19. What is your primary source of income? _____
    Other sources (please specify) _____
20. How soon after your initial arrival did you obtain your first job? _____
21. What type of job(s) have you had in the U.S.? _____
22. How did you get your job(s)?

23. Are you satisfied with your present job?

24. Does your company offer health insurance?
____ yes, the company pays for it ___ yes, but I have to pay to be covered ____ no
25. What are some of the biggest problems for you as you started working in the U.S.?

26. What are some of the easiest things?

Cultural Adjustment
27. Are you surprised by the way life has turned out for you here -- did you expect something different? Is it better or worse?

28. Have you found your adjustment to the U.S. to be
_____ very easy _____ easy _____ okay _____ hard _____ very hard
29. In what ways have your beliefs or behavior changed since you arrived in the U.S.?

30. How are the children doing in school?

31. How is the education different from in your homeland?

32. If you attended an overseas cultural orientation, what did you learn there that you think is particularly useful for your life in the U.S.?

33. Were there things you did not learn that you wish you had learned? If so, what were they?

34. Do you have any suggestions for the pre-departure program?

Please put your completed questionnaire in the attached envelope, seal it and return it to your case manager or other person designated to collect the quesionnaire. Thank you for your participation.